

Beam Park Station Debate – Full Text

Thank you

This afternoon I want to make a series of points relating to the failure to proceed with the proposed station at Beam Park in my constituency.

Now this station is essential for several reasons:

- First to successfully complete the Beam Park housing development and wider regeneration across south Havering and Barking and Dagenham.

It remains key to unlocking other housing schemes along the A1306 East towards Rainham and west to Dagenham - an area forming part of London's largest Opportunity Area.

The station is central to making a success of these possibilities.

- Second - it is essential to make good on countless promises made over many years to local residents who have bought homes there - and fear their homes are now fast depreciating.

They feel they have been deceived.

- Third in following through with commitments made to the wider community - who have accepted new housing on the basis of promised new infrastructure.

They too feel let down and angry.

But there is also a wider national issue here regarding the so-called Levelling Up agenda. If the Government is serious about imposing housing targets on local authorities, then they must support the infrastructure and services to go with them - especially when for years these have been promised to residents in order to secure their consent for these plans

In this sense Beam Park station is an example of how not to regenerate communities, - of how to maximise cynicism and anger in local communities - as people feel manipulated and exploited by the planning system – a story of promises made then subsequently withdrawn once consent has been secured.

I say to the Minister. Unless the local situation is resolved I fear there will be long lasting effects that will inhibit future economic development and undermine community support for regeneration. The stakes are that high

By way of background

The London Borough of Havering – a Conservative Borough - has historically been the prime mover behind the planned Beam Park station. It then secured wider support. The detailed project came via the Housing Zone programme devised by the present Prime Minister when he served as Mayor of London.

Under Mayor Johnson’s programme - London Boroughs could seek Housing Zone status and funding based on bids that would commit to increasing housing outputs - beyond what would have been delivered otherwise.

The funding was primarily for infrastructure projects or land remediation - that would facilitate large scale housing development. This was always the purpose of the station – to secure greater housing units.

Havering worked up a bid to the GLA as far back as 2013 to bring about the development of Beam Park. The bid was approved by Havering Council’s Cabinet in August 2014 – driven through by the then Housing Cabinet Member - Damian White – the present Council Leader.

In June 2015 Havering secured Housing Zone status and funding for the Beam Park development programme. One of only four agreed at the time. It was a flagship policy for Mayor Johnson. Mayor Johnson said at the time and I quote “Housing Zones will provide swift delivery of new homes for Londoners that are so desperately needed and create entirely new highly connected urban districts”

In December 2015 Havering and the GLA entered into agreement for £9.6m of Housing Zone funding to cover station design and initial construction.

Havering then funded the Governance for Railway Investment Projects process – through a contract with Network Rail. Standard documents from Network Rail were then reviewed by the GLA’s internal and external legal advisors.

In 2020 the GLA agreed to invest £32.75m to construct Beam Park station - stating, I quote "GLA and Countryside are working closely with Network Rail to progress plans for the station"

It was a done deal – or at least appeared to be - signed off by the Conservative Mayor, the Conservative Council, and developers and having secured the backing of the Conservative Government – or so we were all led to believe.

For example, by the way Network Rail was involved in progressing the project throughout the process – a willing partner. The Network Rail route utilisation plan from July 2020 – describes Beam Park as, I quote, a 'committed scheme'

Once operational the station was to be transferred to the franchise operator - C2C – to have ongoing responsibility for the station. Once again C2C was a willing partner.

Everyone realizes that without additional infrastructure the existing C2C stations will creak under the pressure of our expanding population. Over the years I have worked with C2C to alleviate congestion at Rainham station – it will not cope with thousands more commuters and could well become unsafe at peak times. So, the new station at Beam Park would spread the footfall across three sites – Dagenham Dock, Beam Park and Rainham.

In the original C2C franchise agreement before the pandemic hit - and actually published on the DfT website - it states: 'The Franchise shall provide all reasonable assistance and cooperation to the sec of state and any other parties responsible for or involved with the development of a new station at Beam Park'

So far so good.

On the basis of these commitments local residents accepted extraordinary levels of housing development across south Havering and Barking and Dagenham. We are talking tens of thousands of new units – against a backdrop of austerity and service cuts – because of promised infrastructure.

The Beam Park development alone proposed 3,200 homes – for 13,000 new residents - through a Countryside / L&Q partnership. Yet the scheme was always conditional on a new station at Beam Park being provided. Indeed, a

Grampian clause means development cannot progress past Phase 3 unless the station is delivered.

To date, 1,150 homes on phases 1 and 2 are in construction or completed and sold. Other local housing developments are dependent on the station.

Developers actually continue to market the properties – literally this afternoon - on the back of the new station – promising 20 minutes journey time into Fenchurch Street.

Then everything changed later last year.

The DfT issued letters to the GLA and C2C in August 2021 stating that the Department is not supportive of the development of a new station at Beam Park. In a letter to me the Minister of State stated ‘it is not that the Department withdrew support or funding for the development of the station, but that support was never given in the first place’

This announcement blindsided developers and the wider private sector along with both the GLA and local authority. The station is an advanced and fully costed project.

GLA officers have worked with Havering, Network Rail, c2c, TfL for years; there’s a collective desire to see the station brought into service as soon as possible. Detailed designs are in place and construction was due to commence last autumn. The construction of the station will be funded by GLA. All required funding has been secured. The GLA has also agreed to provide DfT with an indemnity for the first 10 years to protect against any operational deficit.

Now in a general sense I think we can all agree that it is critical that infrastructure is provided which allows land to be developed to its full potential. And Beam Park is an excellent example of this.

As well as unlocking homes for over 13,000 residents, the station will form a civic heart for Beam Park - acting as a catalyst for the regeneration of the surrounding area, which has high levels of deprivation.

The new station will also bring environmental benefits by encouraging a shift away from car use and supporting a reduction in parking.

The housing projects unlocked by the station will invest over £1 billion into the local area, delivering two new primary schools, a three-hectare park, community and health centres and over 60,000 sqft of commercial space, directly creating hundreds of jobs.

All this and more is now threatened.

Let me spell this out quite simply.

Since the DFT announcement:

- private sector enthusiasm for local regeneration has spun into reverse,
- already local CPOs have been withdrawn - they were dependent on the infrastructure
- in short, the business model for the whole area has been thrown into question
- community anger is intense, new residents feel their property values are in freefall
- long term residents feel manipulated by the local authority with false promises of an infrastructure uplift

Local anger is palpable and totally understandable - within a few weeks thousands have signed local petitions seeking to get the government to change its mind.

For the Government's own housing and levelling up agenda this decision is a disaster – it is draining support for new housing in a key national priority area for regeneration

I have met with Countryside - they are very supportive of efforts to restore the station project. They have commissioned Grant Thornton to assess the social and economic impact and wider benefits of the Project. I have written to ministers, spoken with the GLA's Deputy Mayor for Housing, Tom Copley, who has shared his correspondence with Ministers calling for the station to be allowed to go ahead.

The basis for the Govt's withdrawal of support appears to centre on the indemnity that the GLA is offering to DfT - as the DfT are not actually contributing any funding to the capital cost of the station. The GLA has offered £10m to cover a 10-year period, whereas DfT appears to want an unlimited figure over an unlimited period.

But to be honest my real concern is for the local residents. New residents of Beam Park are angry - feeling that they have been sold homes on a false prospectus – many are now seeking legal redress.

The government decision undermines the strategic role of the local authority in Havering – who at best have been shown to be negligent and poorly managed.

It is an appalling state of affairs when the then Mayor and Council can agree the project – assume their own Government and Network Rail back it - and then only years later due to a lack of due diligence discover that they do not - and claim to have never done so – with terrible collateral consequences for residents

I don't want to twist the knife - make party political points here.

But the reality is that this dreadful situation has consequences for thousands of my constituents – and will likely derail hundreds of millions of pounds of investment in my area.

I am angry and frustrated at the reckless decision making at the heart of this project.

It is I repeat an appalling state of affairs.

Yet it is not too late to resolve the situation

I am sure there are inter-governmental tensions around this decision – not least given the government's stated housing objectives.

Should the Govt not change its mind and allow the station to proceed, the future phases of Beam Park and other housing schemes in the area will be in doubt - as planning consents are dependent on there being a station.

There would probably need to be new planning applications to both Havering and Barking and Dagenham councils.

There will be escalating anger and opposition to new housing development – both new and long-term residents feel they have been played and betrayed.

Meanwhile government policy appears completely out of sync.

We see the Government mounting pressure on local authorities to increase housing targets, yet simultaneously pulling the plug on infrastructure needed to support both new and existing communities in their priority areas.

I am told that Havering Council has instructed lawyers to consider a Judicial Review against the DfT decision. To legally challenge their own government – quite a state of affairs.

Meanwhile they are trying to blame everyone apart from themselves for this debacle.

So, this afternoon I urge the government to sit down with the GLA and resolve this indemnity issue and fastrack the station.

It's not too late

The Tory “levelling up” sound bite is all well and good, but actions speak louder than words.

Either through negligence or indifference those in power have reneged on promises of meaningful investment

Their failure to deliver Beam Park station risks growth grinding to a halt across the south of my constituency.

I urge the government to urgently rethink their plans for Beam Park station.

Thanks, you very much